Community Area #70
Ashburn

Population: 37,082
Number of Structures: 12,337
Avg. Date of Construction: 1956

Significant Structures: 10

Source: 1990 Census, Harris File, CHRS

(Dots show approximate, rather than specific, locations of significant structures.)
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Ashburn is a residential community of modest brick houses, most of which were built in the decades following World War II. Although it became part of the Town of Lake in 1865, and was therefore annexed to Chicago in 1889, the area experienced only small, isolated spurts of development until the 1940s.

The land that became Ashburn supported farming until late in the nineteenth century. The area was annexed by Chicago in 1889 as part of the larger annexation of the Town of Lake, although the earliest subdivision, Clarkdale, was not created until 1893. Located between 79th, 85th, Crawford (now Pulaski), and Central Park, Clarkdale boasted fewer than 50 houses by the turn of the century. A frame cottage at 3412 West 84th St. remains from this settlement.

Two railroad lines ran through the area: the Wabash, now the Norfolk and Southern, and the Grand Trunk Western. The Wabash tracks ran parallel to Columbus Avenue in a diagonal line from northeast to southwest through the area. The Grand Trunk Western tracks run north-south between Kedzie and Pulaski. In 1908, the area's name was changed to Ashburn because there was a larger town named Clarkdale elsewhere on the Wabash line. The Loop was miles away and there was no significant industry. Special assessments for needed public improvements, city codes mandating that construction be of brick, and antiquated deed restrictions all acted as brakes on development.
Despite these problems, Ashburn's remote location and abundance of open land did attract, for a
decade, one group of people--aviation enthusiasts.
In 1916, Chicago's Aero Club, one of the first in the
country, established Ashburn Field on 640 acres at
83rd St. and Cicero Avenue. That winter, the Army
Signal Corps used it for a few months as the base
for a pilot training school, with only tents to shelter
people and planes, until the unit decamped to the
warmer climate of Memphis. Grant Park was the
Chicago area's only other important civilian airfield.
Ashburn Field served entrepreneurs building
airplanes, students of an aviation school
established in 1920, and a growing number of
amateur and professional pilots. Its importance,
however, was eclipsed by the opening of Municipal
(now Midway) Airport in 1926. The last parcel of
Ashburn Field's acreage was sold in the 1950s.

By 1940, the community area's population was still
only about 700. However, the area's large amount
of vacant land finally began to attract developers
after World War II, when nearby industrial growth
created a need for housing. The population
exploded, increasing ten-fold by 1950, quintupling
to 35,000 by 1960, and peaking around 47,000 in
1970. Unfortunately, little remains from the pre-war
period, and the community continues to be heavily
residential with a smattering of industrial
development.

The focus of the Chicago Historic Resources
Survey was on buildings erected prior to 1940.
Buildings and developments erected after that date
generally are not included in the inventory.